Dirk the Daring faces the evil Dragon.

THE FUTURE OF THE ARCADE INDUSTRY IS HERE!

"Dragon's Lair," the first animated laser disc arcade game, hit the market place July 1, 1983. In the months following, it was hailed throughout the country for helping turn around the financial slump into which the entire industry had fallen. It has even been credited as the most revolutionary idea to hit the game-playing public since the invention of Pong.

The credit for "Dragon's Lair," and the courage it took to be the first company to produce such a game, belongs to Starcom Inc., a consortium of three companies: Don Bluth Animation, RDI and Cinematronics. These three, each outstanding in their own fields, took the risks, set the standards and continue to lead the field. Their newest brainchild, "Space Ace," is expected to be released in early Spring, 1984.

Dexter and Kimberley speed to another peril.

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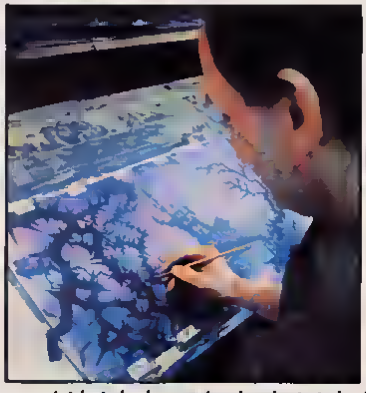
...Thanks to Classical Animation and Laser Disc Technology

Though there were many who said laser disc technology was not yet advanced enough to build a game around, Starcom was confident that the laser beam would bring new light to the quality of game-play. With the technology harnessed, revelations occurred as to the kind of game that could be made. No longer did anyone have to settle for the eye-searing stick-and-dot graphics that had heretofore been the mainstay of video games. Suddenly, art was possible. And with it came story and characters, music and sound effects and even dialogue. The stuff of movies.



Intricate background and orchestrated colors add to richness of Classical Animation.

THE ARTISTS

Don Bluth and his partners Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy began the Second Age of Animation in 1982 with the release of their first feature film, "The Secret of NIMH," richly robed in all the elements of Classical Animation that had been missing from films during the preceding three decades. The artists, who began their own company in 1979, gathered together a group of the best-trained young animators in the world, people who shared their commitment to prove that Classical Animation is still a valiant, and valid, art form.

WHAT IS CLASSICAL ANIMATION?

In "Dragon's Lair," there are 22 minutes of animation, including all the wonderful ways Dirk can die. Though a good game player can make it through the 38 rooms of the castle in about six minutes, people die purposely at a new place each time just to see the rich animation.

Classical Animation differs from other forms in several ways. There are still the clear plastic sheets called "cels" on which the characters are painted, and they are still photographed against painted backgrounds. But Classical Animation is more. It is not seen on Saturday morning television. Even most of the movies since the 1950s have not had the depth and richness of the truly classical style: strong characters, vivid colors orchestrated for emotional impact, unusual camera angles, richly detailed backgrounds and contact shadows under the characters or other special effects such as Princess Daphne's diaphanous peignoir, the white-hot glow around flames, the zapping of electricity, the rush of lava.

DOUBLE OPPORTUNITY

Bluth sees animation in arcade games as a double opportunity. It is a brand new place to put the special skills of animators to work, and it is the place to reach the audience of teenagers and young adults he wants to garner for his future films.

He and his partners, Goldman and Pomeroy, met while they were all animators at Disney Studios. They began a project at night and on weekends in Bluth's garage which was designed to be an educational tool by which they could learn the tricks of the masters. "Banjo, The Woodpile Cat" took five-and-a-half years to complete, by which time the trio had left Disney. "Banjo" was seen on ABC-TV as an animated special.

They then animated the two-minute sequence of "Don't Walk Away," a love song in the film "Xanadu." After "NIMH's" release in 1982, they began six months of work on "Dragon's Lair." They have just completed animation on the second Starcom game, "Space Ace," and are beginning work on the third game, "Dragon's Lair II."

Don Bluth and fellow producers Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy

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